

## Church Leaders Statement on Foreign Policy

Dear Foreign Minister,

As leaders within Australia's churches, we welcome the Government's decision to reflect deeply on Australia's place in the world and develop a foreign policy framework to guide our international engagement over the next decade. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this process.

Our starting point is our fundamental conviction that every human being is created in the image of God, bearing inherent worth and dignity.

We recall, also, that Jesus asked us to "love our neighbours as ourselves." While this is a call to the church it was also, in the Hebrew Scriptures, a commandment *to a nation*. Jesus' words remind us that a concern for the needs and rights of others must not be an afterthought nor the accidental by-product of a unilateral pursuit of self-interest. Rather, that we must apply the same concern for the rights and interests of others that we apply to our own.

We respond as well to God's priority for the poorest and most vulnerable people. We believe that God calls all people to deliberate, judge, govern and trade with special care to protect the rights of those living in poverty in any community. In international, as well as domestic, affairs, we believe that governments are mandated to "give justice to the poor" and to "uphold the rights of the oppressed."

In light of this, we believe that:

1) the **purpose** of Australia's foreign policy should be to achieve the sustainable flourishing and well-being of all Australians and of our global neighbours.

Australia is a wealthy nation located in a region with large populations of people living in poverty, and which is highly affected by natural disasters. Australia shares Pacific Ocean boundaries with small island states of the Pacific and developing countries of Asia and we share Indian Ocean boundaries with nations of South and Western Asia and Africa. The vast majority of the world's poorest people (those living in absolute destitution on less than US \$ 1.90 per day) are our neighbours, living within this wider region. This appalling and grinding poverty is not merely financial or material; it robs people of the capacity to live dignified, secure and healthy lives and limits their potential to contribute to their societies. This poverty harms people's health, stifles their freedoms and capabilities, and tragically cuts short too many lives.

We believe it would be a powerful expression of both Australia's values and our interests to ensure that our foreign policy is directed towards ensuring that our region is peaceful and secure, that all people are able to thrive sustainably, and that we are contributing to international efforts to fight poverty and meet global challenges.

2) the **values** of Australia's foreign policy should be aligned with those that undergird Australia's national character and institutions and which represent our best selves: compassion and generosity, a "fair go" for battlers and the underdog, tolerance and inclusion, as well as a commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

Articulating and promoting these values will not only engage Australian citizens more deeply with our foreign policy but also represents the best pathway towards maintaining Australia's security and prosperity in an increasingly fragmented global context.

3) the **processes** of Australia's foreign policy should prioritise multilateral forums and bilateral engagements which promote peace and democratic deliberation and which serve to address common challenges which threaten the security and well-being of all people.

Australia has a proud history of international engagement and a reputation as an influential actor in the community of nations. We are best able to influence regional and global affairs not through coercion or force but rather by taking the lead and contributing our fair share to tackling shared problems, acting predictably, promoting multilateral cooperation, and abiding by and promoting

human rights, democratic norms and the principles and processes of international law. Australia's interests are best served by maintaining an unwavering commitment to a collaborative, predictable, rules-based global order, especially in the face of recent trends around the world which promote isolationism, exclusionary nationalisms or the forceful pursuit of naked self-interest.

4) the **priorities** for Australia's foreign policy should be to address regional and global challenges such as the scourge of poverty, economic exclusion and rising inequality, grave breaches of people's human and civic rights, and the vulnerability of our nation and our neighbours to natural disasters and the increasing impact of climate change.

Through mutually beneficial trade, the sharing of ideas, know-how, technology and resources, Australia helps create opportunities and share prosperity. Australia's aid program, too, makes a profound contribution to supporting our neighbours as they strive to overcome poverty and should be a shining beacon within Australia's foreign policy. We urge the Government to take concrete steps to increase our development assistance towards the internationally-agreed target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) – a benchmark which the United Kingdom, among other nations, has already met.

Global inequality, which is socially harmful and economically damaging, is increasing. In our region a tragically large number of young people are unable to find decent work. We support free and open trade among nations but recognise that the poorest and most marginalised people are often excluded from enjoying the fruits of trade and the benefits of growth. Our trade, aid and diplomatic efforts should aim to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equitably and that youth and young people, women and girls, people with disabilities and other marginalised people are able to secure dignified work and participate fully in the economy. We must always be committed to human rights, as well as labour and environmental protections at the heart of our trade and investment efforts.

More people on the face of the planet are either refugees or internally displaced than at any other time in human history. The severity of this unprecedented global displacement of people is only likely to increase. Australia's foreign policy must continue to make peace-keeping and conflict prevention an urgent priority. We must also ensure that we do our fair share to care for those affected by conflict and pursue genuine regional and global cooperation to find sustainable protection for refugees.

Unsustainable consumption and depletion of natural resources, such as forests and fisheries, along with damage to the ecosystems on which we all depend pose threats to the wellbeing of all people. Climate change in particular poses an urgent and increasing threat. This is especially the case in the Pacific where relatively poor island nations are vulnerable to sea level rise, freshwater contamination, damage to crops and fisheries and increasingly severe extreme weather events such as flooding and cyclones. Australia should play an active and constructive role in international efforts to address climate change and other environmental degradation. Our diplomatic efforts must be matched by urgent domestic action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as an equitable contribution towards rapidly achieving net zero greenhouse emissions globally, in line with our Paris Agreement commitments.

In short, Australia's foreign policy should promote the development of inclusive economies, the strengthening of accountable and responsive institutions, the promotion of peace and human security, as well as the preservation of sustainable and flourishing ecologies.

Finally we note that as Australian church leaders we are deeply engaged with issues of international relations and foreign policy. Our churches are, themselves, international bodies. We represent bodies of believers, bound together in relationships of shared faith and love, crossing geographical, social, economic and cultural boundaries. We have deep connections with churches in the Indo-Pacific region where, in many places, the churches play an institutional role in community governance, promoting peace and resolving conflict, and providing vital services such as education and health.

We confess that as leaders and as churches we often fall short of God's work of justice, reconciliation and peace. We do not always act with justice, mercy or humility. But we offer the Government our prayers and our support as it considers Australia's place in the community of nations. Just as we receive God's blessings so we might also share them abundantly as a blessing to others.

Yours,



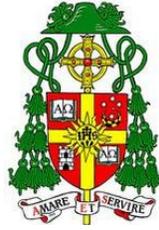
Ben Thurley (Micah Australia National Coordinator) on behalf of:

+Philip Huggins



Bishop Philip Huggins  
President, NCCA

+Greg O'Kelly



Bishop Greg O'Kelly  
Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie

Stuart McMillan



Pastor Stuart McMillan  
President, Uniting Church in Australia

Floyd Tidd



Commissioner Floyd Tidd  
National Commander, Salvation Army

John Henderson



Bishop John Henderson  
Lutheran Church of Australia

Jorge Munoz



Pastor Jorge Munoz  
Chair, Adventist Development & Relief Agency

Keith Jobberns



Rev Keith Jobberns  
National Ministries Director,  
Australian Baptist Ministries

Wayne Alcorn



Pastor Wayne Alcorn  
President, Australian Christian Churches

Janet Woodlock



Rev Janet Woodlock  
Federal Coordinator, Churches of Christ

Wayne Smith



Pastor Wayne Smith  
National Leader, Apostolic Church Australia

James Kwang



Bishop Dr James Kwang  
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Joe Goodall



Dr Joe Goodall  
Moderator, Congregational Federation of  
Australia & New Zealand